

E.P.C. Welsh Drama Series, No. 32

A MONOLOGUE FOR ME

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By NAUNTON DAVIES

AUTHOR OF

"The Great Experiment," "The Arrogance of Power," "The Schemer,"
"The Human Factor," "Daughters of Eve," "A Near Thing," "The
Conversion," "The Counter-Stroke," "A Pair of Bracelets,"
"The Crash," "The Second Son," "The
Epidemic," etc., etc.

"The Cobweb," } *In collaboration with*
"The Wanton," } *Leon M. Lion.*

CARDIFF :
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1920.

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891.662

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no. 32

CHARACTERS :

ROWLAND MORLEY - A Dramatic Author.

GRANVILLE BRANSCOMBE - A Star Actor.

GERALDINE O'CONNOR - - Secretary to
Branscombe.

Cecil Grad. Egt. Parry 18423 Educ. Publ. Co.

p 46872

SCENE :

A Room in Branscombe's Flat, London.

TIME :

Present Day.

A MONOLOGUE FOR ME.

[SCENE.—A room in BRANSCOMBE'S flat, London. BRANSCOMBE, a star actor, is seen lounging in an easy chair, smoking a cigar, and reading a newspaper. He is rather a big, handsome man, full of himself, about 40. ENTER to him ROWLAND MORLEY, about 35, a cultured Oxford Graduate—a dramatic author.]

BRANSCOMBE (*rousing himself*) : Hullo ! Morley. Glad to see you. You're as welcome as the sign of a "pub" to a thirsty man. Have you got a new play for me ?

MORLEY : There's nothing new under the sun, Branscombe. I've got *something* for you, but I haven't the courage to call it a play.

BRANSCOMBE : What is it then—a dirge or a comic song ?

MORLEY : A hotch-potch written to your order ; a fret-work of silliness, with more fret than sense.

BRANSCOMBE : It sounds good.

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MORLEY : I'm sorry you think so. I wish you would produce that other little play of mine, "The Real Thing."

BRANSCOMBE : That sentimental oozing from a sickly soul, with four people in it? Never!

MORLEY : It's strong, emotional, human.

BRANSCOMBE : Managers wouldn't look at it.

MORLEY : They are not all such fools as you think. They don't all shout the parrot-cry, "Comedy, comedy, and nothing but comedy."

BRANSCOMBE : No—some of 'em shout "Drivel," and the rest shout "Farce," or "Amen." You've got to mix the wildly improbable with the infinitely ridiculous, put it into my serious mouth, and it'll come out in golden drops of mirth. Let's see the hotch-potch. If it's a monologue for me, it's all right.

MORLEY (*tosses M.S. to BRANSCOMBE*) : There it is, written down to your level.

BRANSCOMBE : Tut! tut! you're always in the clouds. I can make anything go down with a gurgle, if it's written round my personality. The public, bless 'em! come to see me, not the play.

MORLEY : True! you are more substantial than the play, and an intellectual appeal has no chance in a physical competition.

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BRANSCOMBE : All right, old man, don't get cynical. It isn't natural at your time of life. You can take it from me that the great B.P. don't want emotions and tears, but action and laughter.

MORLEY : Then why the deuce don't you caper about the stage with a set of dummies, and leave real plays for fools to perform ?

BRANSCOMBE (*laughing*) : Not a bad idea ! Can you suggest a few details for such a masterpiece ?

MORLEY (*savagely*) : Yes ! Tie a bladder to a stick, belabour a fellow in an ass's skin, and drive home the moral on a big drum.

BRANSCOMBE : A cheap orchestra, by jove ! Why, they'd roar themselves hoarse at such a show.

MORLEY : There are some people who laugh at the stolid glint in the eye of a pig ; who's world is his stomach and whose life is a grunt.

BRANSCOMBE (*good-humouredly*) : My dear old chap, people must have bacon, and they must laugh ; and if they don't find drama to their taste, why on earth shouldn't they have pigs and squeals ?

MORLEY : They don't want pig. You simply shove it down their throats, like a beastly emetic. You don't even try to make it up into decent sausage.

BRANSCOMBE : Who's responsible, I'd like to know ?

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MORLEY : Just a few misguided men, who think the British Public has no morals, men who only have a nose for filth. Unfortunately, they are in authority. I wish to the lord we had a real Censor.

BRANSCOMBE : My dear Morley, draw it mild. Don't let the pot boil over, or you'll scald yourself.

MORLEY : I'll have my say, if I die for it.

BRANSCOMBE : You are too altruistic for this sinful world, my son. The wise man smokes shag when he can't rise to a cigar. Take my tip, and make the best of pig. Break out in A Monologue for me, fling sentiment to the dogs, and there you are.

MORLEY : I can't do it. If I am to write decently, I must *hear* and *see* my characters about me, and feel that they have a story worth the telling. The clash of interests, the crash of action, and the warring moods of men and women can alone make a living picture. A monologue's beyond me. I might as well take up a rapier, and cut and thrust at a sack of sawdust, and pretend it's a duel, as attempt to clothe a lump of flesh with dramatic interest. Try it yourself. Write an Epistle to the Public ; declaim it from the stage, with antics to suit the words, and see what'll come of it (*throws himself into a chair*).

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BRANSCOMBE : I'll do it! I'll give 'em Branscombe up to date! (*laughs*) Look here! If I got on that chair, and held up my leg by the hem of my trousers, and the thing ripped (*imitates ripping cloth*) they'd scream themselves hoarse. The curious thing is, if you did it, they wouldn't laugh at all, because you couldn't put your soul into it. It's personality does it.

MORLEY : A unique personality to put his soul into the leg of his trousers. A leg-up in that way doesn't appeal to me.

BRANSCOMBE (*with a laugh*) : You're getting on!

MORLEY : A play must have balance, Branscombe, and the balance of a man on one leg is precarious, to say the least of it.

BRANSCOMBE : It would give you a balance at the bank, and that's the only balance that matters.

MORLEY : What about self-respect—reputation?

BRANSCOMBE (*who had been dipping into the MS. suddenly glares at MORLEY, strikes the MS. in the flat of his hand*) : Reputation! You talk about reputation—you—who dare to cut me up—*me*—into the fourth part of a quartette. Have I climbed to fame to be smothered, overlain, by this quadrigenarious quartette? I'll show you how to write a play.

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MORLEY : It won't be worth the bray of an ass when you have done with it.

BRANSCOMBE : Apologise, you brute !

MORLEY : Well, it *will* be worth the bray of an ass, and that's about all.

(BRANSCOMBE *takes a pencil and "cuts" page after page ruthlessly.*)

MORLEY : I say, leave the covers.

BRANSCOMBE (*tosses the mutilated MS. to MORLEY*) : What do you think of that for a bit of critic's work ?

MORLEY (*glancing at the play*) : It's characteristic. The soul has been struck out of it, and there's only flesh left.

BRANSCOMBE : The bigger the folly, the bigger the laugh.

MORLEY : The world lives to laugh now and cry later on.

BRANSCOMBE : It's good to laugh 'till you cry. Give me the book. (MORLEY *throws it at him.*) Here we are ! I'll do the big part, and you throw in interjections, to keep me going.

MORLEY : But there's a girl in it. You can't tie a girl down to interjections. If you do, there'll be something unprintable said.

BRANSCOMBE : Good ! That'll tickle the gallery. Here, sit down and take notes in shorthand. (MORLEY *seats himself at the table, opens a note*

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book, and prepares to take notes.) We'll give her a line or two to keep her quiet. H'm!

I'm a Judge, about to sentence a prisoner for larceny. (*Clears his throat, strikes an attitude.*) Notice the attitude and the judicial cough. (*Business.*) Eleanor Rachel Smart. No, that won't do. She musn't be smart at the very start.

MORLEY : For Heaven's sake ! don't make bad jokes.

BRANSCOMBE : Our best judge does it—poor “darling ” !—ahem ! Always gas, dear boy, when there's a vacuum to be filled. It catches the B.P. under the fifth rib, gastric gurgle, you know.

MORLEY : Oh, get on, and don't drag in physiology ; there's enough beastliness in plays without that.

BRANSCOMBE : Fastidious youth ! Attention ! Scene one :—Prisoner at the bar, you are accused of stealing (*fumbles with the pages*) stealing—There's no reference here to the article purloined. The indictment is bad in law, worse than the offence in morals. The Johnnie who fuddled it up ought to be sentenced to six months in the bubbly bottle division, lemonade side.

MORLEY : Do be serious ! The girl (*points to page*) there is accused of stealing bank notes from her employer's safe.

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BRANSCOMBE : Rot ! If the safe was safe, she couldn't steal 'em. No, it was a gold locket from her lover, heart shaped, of course. He gave it her as a pledge of something or other. They quarrelled, and he forgot. Portia defends herself—through me—and turns the tables on the unsafe safe-maker and the lost memory mortal, and gets compensation from the government. Work in a joke about pledges—my Uncle's pawn-ticket—see ? I can make a lot out of that.

MORLEY : I thought " Uncle " usually made the profit.

BRANSCOMBE : What's the odds, so long as I make the jokes ?

MORLEY : You can't joke in a Court of Law.

BRANSCOMBE : You can do anything in a Court of Mono-law-g, dear boy. You can commit a judge for contempt of court ; make the jury sing comic songs ; criticise the critics ; and make every fellow see himself as he ought not to be.

MORLEY : You seem to have got your ideas from the funny man in the bar of a pub on Saturday night.

BRANSCOMBE : The spirit speaks—what ! " Hi, waiter ! Three pen'oth o' gin 'ot : an' I'll toss yer who pyes." I get my laugh, hurry back to the Seat of Justice, dab my nose with red, and let the gin speak. A pal at the back throws a

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cabbage at me, by way of fraternal greeting, and the court missionary presents the peeress in the dock with a red rose, peppered with snuff, the emblem of tears.

MORLEY : Branscombe, old chap, your mind is wandering.

BRANSCOMBE : Lottery-tottery ; but what matter ? The peeress in the dock sniffs the snuff in the red rose, gets into wild hysterics, and the court missionary swears by all the demons of ruddy ruin——

MORLEY : Stop, stop ! Missionaries don't swear.

BRANSCOMBE : My missionary does. He's not a common missionary. The noble judge comforts the pretty peeress and encourages her to hold the snuffy rose under the missionary's nose, until he dies sneezing. Talk about poetical justice ! What do you say to that ?

MORLEY : It's the most crazy thing ever imagined out of Bedlam.

BRANSCOMBE : What's crazy to you will be a craze to the B.P. Don't be jealous ! You shall have all the credit, and it'll make you infamous ! Observe. Nobody speaks but me in this monologue. The missionary and the maid move only when I pull the strings.

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MORLEY (*laughing*): If I didn't know you, I should say you'd got acute "D.T.'s."

BRANSCOMBE: The B.P. understand D.T.'s; they don't understand the higher ethics (*trying to arrange pages of MS.*). Pshaw! The beastly thing has got tangled up. It was you chippin' in that spoiled it all. Never mind! it'll stand for all time as a mighty intellectual effort. Give me a whiskey and soda and help yourself (*flops into an easy chair—MORLEY laughingly fans him, and hands him a whiskey and soda*). We've done a jolly good morning's work. We deserve a drink. Here's success to The Monologue!

MORLEY: May it be buried twenty thousand fathoms deep in the dead sea! (*Drinks.*) If you'd only put on "The Real Thing," and get away from your past.

BRANSCOMBE: Dear boy! my past is my repast, I live on it. (*MORLEY throws something at him.*)

There's a knock at the door.

BRANSCOMBE: Come in!

(*ENTER GERALDINE O'CONNOR, a refined, pretty, girl with delicate colouring, sad looking, and quietly dressed.*)

GERALDINE (*letters in her hand*): The post, Mr. Branscombe. (*Suddenly catches sight of*

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MORLEY, *stands transfixed, trembles.*) Rowland!
(*She shrinks back to the door, drops letters on chair.*)

MORLEY (*rising quickly, his eyes fixed on* GERALDINE): Geraldine!—You!

(*There is a tense silence, they are both agitated.*
BRANSCOMBE *looks on with astonishment.*)

BRANSCOMBE: You appear to know my Secretary, Morley?

MORLEY: Yes. (*A painful silence.*) Geraldine! Are you sorry to see me?

GERALDINE (*struggling with emotion*): It is dreadful to meet you like this.

MORLEY: What do you mean? I have been searching for you everywhere. You come back into my life, and I am glad—glad!

GERALDINE: It would be better for you—to forget me.

MORLEY: I don't want to forget you. Since you left me, you have never been out of my thoughts.

GERALDINE: After what happened, I can never come back to you, never!

MORLEY: I don't understand. You speak of something that happened?

GERALDINE: You must know—you do know. Don't ask me to recall those days of shame!

MORLEY: I want your story from your own lips.

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GERALDINE (*in a low voice*): From my own lips? I wanted to tell you then—at the time—but I was afraid—afraid! (*Pauses, distressed.*) I feared what you would think, feared that you would drive me from you; and I couldn't face that.

MORLEY: You need not have feared. Tell me the truth. You will find that I am not a harsh judge.

GERALDINE: I have told the truth to others. They said they would believe me. But, when they heard, they shook their heads, and I could see they condemned me in their hearts. I—I'm afraid to tell you—you would condemn me, too, and I—I couldn't bear it (*sobs*).

BRANSCOMBE: I'll leave you, Morley (*looking compassionately at GERALDINE*). Poor little girl! (*Going.*)

GERALDINE (*nervously*): Don't go, please don't go! (*BRANSCOMBE turns back.*) (*To MORLEY despairingly.*) The past is past. Words can't bring it back.

MORLEY: But there is the future (*she remains silent*). Why do you distrust me? Is it kind of you? Is it fair?

GERALDINE: It is for your sake I am silent.

MORLEY: For my sake? Nothing matters to me but—you. Tell me the truth.

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GERALDINE : The truth ? (*Seems a little dazed, puts her hand to her head in a bewildered way.*) The truth ? I—I can't remember. They confused me—frightened me—in the Police Court. I—I—(*wanders off into half-uttered words—shudders at some terrifying memory.*)

BRANSCOMBE (*disturbed*) : The Police Court ? What on earth does she mean, Morley ?

MORLEY : Hush !

GERALDINE : They took me there. They said I was—was a thief (*suddenly realises what she has said, terrified*). Oh—no—no ! I didn't do it. (*In an agony of appeal*) : I'm not guilty—indeed, indeed, I'm not (*almost collapses*).

BRANSCOMBE : I say, this is very distressing, Morley. I don't know what to—to—Oh, damn it ! I'm going to stand by you. Can't you see that you are torturing her ? What right have you to ask her to bare her soul to you ?

MORLEY : She—is—my—wife.

BRANSCOMBE : Your wife ! Forgive me, old fellow. I'll go ; she may speak more freely when you are alone (*looks at her again*). Poor little girl !

MORLEY : Stay, Branscombe. You, as her employer, have a right to hear her story.

GERALDINE (*looking up, still a little dazed*) : Yes, Mr. Branscombe has a right to know what I am. I forgot that. I had nowhere to go, no friends,

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after that day. I had to find work, or ask God to let me sleep (*rests her head on her hand, loses herself in thought*).

(BRANSCOMBE *walks up and down the room, deeply moved*. MORLEY *goes to* GERALDINE, *and tries to comfort her, but she draws away from him*.)

BRANSCOMBE : Come, Miss—Mrs. Morley, we are both your friends, and we're going to see you through (*goes up to her*). Tell us all about it. We'll find a way to straighten things out, you bet. There's my hand (*offers his hand*).

(GERALDINE *looks up at* BRANSCOMBE *wonderingly*. *She slowly holds out her hand, he grasps it, she bursts into tears. The two men are deeply affected, unable for a few moments to trust themselves to speak*.)

MORLEY (*gripping* BRANSCOMBE'S *hand*) : Thank you, Branscombe. I won't forget (*takes him aside*). I feel horribly upset. But she's done no wrong, that I'll swear. I met her two years ago. She was a typist in a solicitor's office. She had been on the stage. I married her. My plays didn't pay. She stuck to her post to help to keep the home going. One day she didn't come home. The next morning the newspapers (*he pauses, overcome with the pain of his recollections*). My God ! Branscombe, it's hard to tell you.

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GERALDINE (*in broken sentences*) : Some bank notes were missing from the safe. One of the missing notes and a skeleton key were found in my desk.

BRANSCOMBE : Ah !

MORLEY : Some enemy must have put them there.

BRANSCOMBE : Go on, Miss—Mrs. Morley.

GERALDINE : They said I had opened the safe with the skeleton key, and stolen the notes. I denied it, but I was confused, contradicted myself, they said. Perhaps I did. It was all so horrible. I wanted to go home to tell you ; but they took me to the Police Court. Was I guilty ? I didn't know ! I couldn't remember what I had done, my brain was in a whirl, I thought I should go mad !

MORLEY : Poor little woman !

GERALDINE : That night I slept in the cells. Slept ! (*laughs hysterically*). They sentenced me to three months' imprisonment. It was the end of my life. I was broken, broken ! for all time dead to those I loved. At last my day of liberty came. Liberty ! What a mockery it was ! It gave me back to the world, a woman without a character, a thing to be jeered at and scorned.

MORLEY : I was there waiting for you. I watched for hours, to take you home. But you didn't come.

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GERALDINE : No, I couldn't face you. I saw you and was afraid. I waited until you had gone. A mist lay heavily on the moors, and I watched you drifting out of my life. I—I thought my heart would break.

MORLEY : Why did you let me go ?

GERALDINE : I loved you—loved you too much to bring a shadow into your life. That is all ! Only indeed, indeed, I never did it.

MORLEY : I know you have never done anything in your life to be ashamed of.

GERALDINE (*with a little gasp of wonder*) : You believe that—after what I have told you ?

MORLEY (*looking steadily, trustfully into her eyes—close to her—one hand stealing out to her*) : When I look into your eyes, I see the truth that leaves no doubt.

GERALDINE (*as MORLEY is speaking, a smile creeps into her eyes and hovers round her lips, and, as he ceases, a glad little cry escapes her*) : Oh, Rowland, if I had only known !

MORLEY (*softly*) : You know now.

GERALDINE (*in a whisper*) : Yes ! (*Sheds tears of happiness in ROWLAND'S arms.*)

BRANSCOMBE (*strangely affected—turns away*) : Pshaw ! pooh ! What a fool I am ! (*Blows his nose to hide his emotion and tries to whistle a tune*)

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(*To himself.*) A damn rotten business I call it. Somebody ought to be shot.

(MORLEY and GERALDINE *silently move to back of stage, furtively watch BRANSCOMBE, and exchange mischievous smiles. A laugh escapes them.*)

BRANSCOMBE (*swings round—stammers*) : Eh ! what ! (*Gasps.*) You've soon got over it ! (MORLEY and GERALDINE *laugh again.*) What the deuce is there to laugh about ?

MORLEY : My little plays generally end in a laugh.

BRANSCOMBE : Your little plays ! You're funny, aren't you ?

MORLEY (*coming down centre*) : Forgive me, old fellow. We've been acting a little scene from my play, "The Real Thing." It was the only way to compel your attention. How do you like it ?

BRANSCOMBE : Like it ? (*Bursts into a fit of laughter.*) I feel inclined to break your neck. You've taken an unfair advantage of me. As for you, Mrs. Morley—

GERALDINE (*coming forward quickly, with a mischievous laugh*) : Geraldine O'Connor, if you please.

BRANSCOMBE : The devil !—I beg your pardon.

MORLEY : Can't you stretch a point, Miss Geraldine, and make my play a little more real ?

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GERALDINE : It would be *quite* convincing then, wouldn't it ?

MORLEY : It would be The Real Thing—if you were really Mrs. Morley.

BRANSCOMBE : If it's a match, Morley, my boy, I'll produce your play with the same cast—as a wedding present.

MORLEY : What about a Monologue for you ?

BRANSCOMBE (*laughing*) : Shut up ! Miss O'Connor, the word's with you. Is it a bargain ?

GERALDINE : It *would* be a pity to spoil such a splendid chance.

MORLEY : An awful pity ! (*Takes her in his arms.*)

CURTAIN.



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PLAYS BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THREE or FOUR ACTS.

- *The Human Factor.
- *The Schemer.
- *The Second Son.
- Daughters of Eve.
- *The Great Experiment.
- *The Arrogance of Power.
- *The Crash.
- Foiled (*for Amateurs*).

ONE ACT.

- *The Village Wizard.
- A Near Thing.
- *The Conversion.
- *The Epidemic.
- *A Monologue for Me.
- The Girl from Cardiff.
- The Counter Stroke.
- A Pair of Bracelets.

By NAUNTON DAVIES, in collaboration with
LEON M. LION.

- The Cobweb. (Four acts.)
- The Wanton. (One act.)
- Red Luck. (One act.)

* Published by the Educational Publishing Co., Ltd.